



The Canterville Ghost

Oscar Wilde
retold by Virginia Evans · Jenny Dooley



Express Publishing



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A small black spider is positioned on a thin, dark web that extends from the letter 'T' of the word "The" in the title.

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Oscar Wilde's mother was very interested in ancient Irish fairy tales and she passed this interest on to Oscar. It is not surprising, then, that he used to tell his two young sons fairy tales and fantastic adventure stories to keep them happy. He published many of them in a collection especially for his children. *The Canterville Ghost* was the first of Oscar Wilde's short stories to be published, in a magazine called *Court & Society Review* in 1887. It is different from other ghost stories because it is a funny story and it shows us that ghost stories do not have to be frightening.

Oscar Wilde travelled to America many times and he used his experiences of meeting American people and knowledge gained from his travels to create the Otis family in *The Canterville Ghost*. He also used his experiences to highlight the many cultural differences between Americans and English people in his story.

At the time it was published, *The Canterville Ghost* was very popular, and even today it is still a very popular story. It has been made into a play, a TV series and a film many times. It is often seen on television and in the theatre. It has even been made into a musical! The story has been translated into many languages and is enjoyed throughout the world by both adults and children.

THE PLOT

The Canterville Ghost is set in the beautiful English countryside near an old town, Ascot, which is famous for its horse racing. Here, in Canterville Chase, a beautiful old country house, lives a 300-year-old ghost from an old English family. The ghost is famous in the area and has frightened many people for years. He is proud of being a very scary ghost. However, things soon change when an American family comes to live in his house, and problems arise for the ghost right from the start.

The previous owner of Canterville Chase, Lord Canterville, warns the Otis family that an old ghost lives there, but they are not worried, as they don't believe in ghosts. The Canterville ghost tries to frighten the family. However, they are not afraid at all. The young twin boys in the family play tricks on him and laugh at him. Mr and Mrs Otis even try to help the ghost. They give him oil for his noisy chains and medicine for his ghostly voice. The ghost is very upset and depressed and he tries to think of other ways to scare them, but everything he tries fails. The Canterville ghost is very sad but then one member of the Otis family helps him in a way he never imagined.

THE CHARACTERS

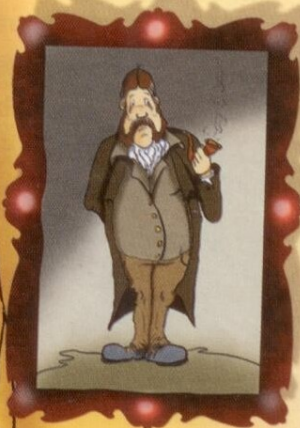


THE CANTERVILLE GHOST

is a frightening character. He likes to scare people so much that they become ill. He gets very annoyed when people are not afraid when they see him. When people trick him, he plans revenge. Sometimes, he can be scared himself – of people and other ghosts. He is actually very sad because he can't go to sleep.

VIRGINIA

is a very caring person. She gets upset easily when she sees things that are sad or unfair. She likes to help people when she sees they are unhappy. She is very brave, even when she is going to meet the Angel of Death. When she gets married, she is very happy. She is very good at keeping secrets.



MR OTIS

is a very straightforward man. He has no imagination. At first, he doesn't believe in ghosts. However, when he sees the ghost, he starts to believe in them. When things are broken, he finds an easy way to fix them. He is fair, and he doesn't want to upset the ghost, as he knows the ghost owned the house before the Otis family.

THE TWINS

are young boys. They like to whisper to each other and plan tricks to play on people. When the tricks upset people, they think it's very funny. They laugh a lot when people hurt themselves. They are quite clever and they are good at making funny plans.





MRS OTIS

is a very healthy woman and she is never ill. She is straightforward, like her husband. She hates her house to be dirty and she is very upset when she sees blood on the floor. She loves her family and she gets very worried when her daughter Virginia is missing. She is very relieved and happy when Virginia comes back.

WASHINGTON OTIS

is very sensible. He can solve problems very easily. He doesn't believe in ghosts. He thinks there is a simple explanation for strange things. He loves his sister Virginia a lot. He is very worried when his sister is missing and he spends hours trying to find her.



MRS UMNEY

is a very organised lady. She works very hard at Canterville Chase. She believes in the ghost and she is very frightened of him. She is so scared that she faints with fear. She is upset when the ghost dies and she wants to say goodbye to him.



LORD CANTERVILLE

is a gentleman. He is very honest. He tries to warn Mr Otis about his haunted house, even though he wants to sell it. He even allows Virginia to keep jewels that belonged to his family a long time ago, because the ghost wanted her to have them.



THE DUKE OF CHESHIRE

loves Virginia very much. He is very happy when he marries Virginia and he doesn't mind when he knows she is keeping a secret from him about the ghost. He is happy that she loves him. He knows that he will love her for ever.





• 1. The Warning •

When the American Minister, Mr Hiram B Otis, bought the large old house called Canterville Chase, everyone told him that he was very foolish. Even Lord Canterville, who wanted to sell the house, tried to tell Mr Otis that it was a mistake to buy it.

"I must be honest with you, Mr Otis," said Lord Canterville. "There is something very strange about this house. My family and I don't stay here very often."

"But what is so strange about the place?" asked Mr Otis.

"There is a ghost here," said Lord Canterville. "It visits anyone who lives or stays here. My poor old aunt, the Dowager Duchess of Bolton, once felt two hands on her shoulders as she dressed for dinner. The hands were cold and hard, like the hands of a skeleton. My poor aunt was very frightened. She became ill, and she never really got better. That is why my family and I do not like to stay here any more."

"Did anyone else see the ghost?" asked Mr Otis.

"The Reverend Augustus Dampier also saw it," said Lord Canterville. "Dampier went to Cambridge University, you know. He's very clever, and not the kind of man who imagines things."

"No, of course not," said Mr Otis.



"After the terrible thing that happened to my dear aunt, most of our servants left the house and didn't want to come back here to work. My poor wife, Lady Canterville, could not sleep at night. She was frightened, and of course, the strange noises that we hear in the halls and in the library make us even more afraid."

"I'm not afraid," said Mr Otis. "I want to take the house, and the ghost. I come from a modern country, where we have everything that money can buy. There is nothing in Europe that we don't have in America. If there were ghosts, we would have some, too, and there are no ghosts in America, you know!"

Lord Canterville smiled.

"I'm afraid that the ghost is real," he said. "It is more than three hundred years old, for members of my family first saw it in 1584. Shortly before any member of my family dies, the ghost appears."

Mr Otis laughed.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I don't believe in ghosts. There is no such thing!"

"Well," smiled Lord Canterville, "I hope you are happy in the house, but you must remember that I warned you, and you did not listen to me."



• 2. Blood in the Library •

Mr Otis bought Canterville Chase, and a few weeks later, he moved into the house with his family. Mr Otis' wife, Lucretia, was a handsome woman and was always in good health. Their eldest son, whose name was Washington, was a fair-haired, good-looking young man. His sister, Virginia, was fifteen. She was slim and beautiful, with large blue eyes. After Virginia came the twins, who were lovely little boys, but they liked to play tricks on people.

It was a lovely July evening. The family enjoyed the evening sun as they travelled towards the house. However, as they got near to Canterville Chase, the sky became dark and big drops of rain began to fall.

An old woman stood in front of the house. Her name was Mrs Umney, and she was the housekeeper at Canterville Chase.

"Welcome to Canterville Chase," she said. "I have tea ready for you in the library."

The family followed her through the large hall into the library. The library was a long room with a large stained-glass window at one end. There was a dark red stain on the floor near the fire.

"Something has been spilt here," said Mrs Otis.

"Yes, madam," Mrs Umney said quietly. "That is blood."

"How horrible!" cried Mrs Otis. "I don't want blood on my floors!"

Mrs Umney smiled.



"That is the blood of Lady Eleanore de Canterville. Her husband, Sir Simon de Canterville, murdered her there in 1575. Sir Simon disappeared suddenly nine years later. No one ever found his body, but his ghost haunts this house. No one can clean the blood from the floor."

"That's silly!" cried Washington. "I can clean it up right now with Pinkerton's Stain Remover!"

He took a small black stick from his pocket and rubbed at the stain with it. The blood quickly disappeared.

"You see?" he cried. "I knew Pinkerton could do it!"

Just then, a terrible flash of lightning lit up the room, and there was a loud crash of thunder. Mrs Umney fell to the floor.

"What terrible weather they have in this country!" said Mr Otis.

"My dear Hiram!" cried Mrs Otis. "What can we do with a woman who faints?"

"We can take money from her wages every time she faints!" said Mr Otis.

When Mrs Umney heard this, she sat up. She was very unhappy.

"You must not make the ghost angry, sir," she said. "Terrible things happen in this house."

But Mr Otis and his wife were not afraid.

"We don't believe in ghosts," they said. "But we would like some tea."



• 3. The Ghost Appears •

The storm continued all night long, but nothing strange happened, and the family slept quite well. However, the next morning, when they came downstairs for breakfast, they found the terrible stain on the library floor again.

"I don't believe it!" said Washington. "It must be the ghost."

He rubbed at the stain a second time, but the next morning it appeared again. That night, Mr Otis locked the library and took the key to bed with him, but the stain was there again the next day. The whole family were now quite interested. Even Mr Otis began to think that there might be a ghost at Canterville Chase, and that night he became completely sure.

It was a warm and sunny day, and in the evening, when it was cool, the family went out for a drive. They came home at nine o'clock, and had a light supper. They talked about famous actresses and actors, and about the foods they missed from America that they could not get in England. They did not talk about ghosts at all, and no one mentioned Sir Simon Canterville.



At eleven o'clock, the family went to bed. By half past eleven everyone was asleep and the house was dark. But suddenly, a strange noise woke Mr Otis. The noise came from the hall outside his bedroom and sounded like the clank of metal. Mr Otis got up, lit a candle and looked at the clock. It was exactly one o'clock. He felt very calm and was not at all worried. He could still hear the strange noise, and now he could also hear footsteps. Mr Otis took a small bottle from the table next to his bed. He opened his bedroom door and saw a terrible sight. There was an old man in the hall with red eyes and long grey hair. His clothes were old, dirty and torn, and there were chains around his wrists and ankles.

"My dear sir," said Mr Otis, "your chains are making a terrible noise. You really must oil them." He showed the man the small bottle.

"This is a bottle of Tammany Rising Sun Lubricator," he said. "It's just what you need."

Mr Otis put the bottle of oil on a table near the ghost, then went back into his bedroom and fell asleep again.



• 4. A Terrible Shock •

When Mr Otis closed his bedroom door, the Canterville ghost stood still for a minute. He was shocked. He could not believe his eyes or his ears. He picked up the bottle of oil and threw it onto the floor. He ran down the hall, making a terrible sound. However, as he got near the top of the stairs, a door opened, and two little boys appeared. They laughed and whispered to each other. Suddenly, they threw a large pillow at the ghost's head.

"Take that, you silly ghost!" shouted the twins.

The ghost disappeared from the hall in a flash of green light. The house became quiet, and the twins went back to bed.

The ghost found a quiet room in the house and stopped to think. He was very upset and felt terribly insulted. How could these people be so rude to him? Why weren't they afraid of him?

The ghost was more than three hundred years old. He was terrible to look at and he frightened everyone who saw him. The ghost thought of the Dowager Duchess, who became ill after he put his hands on her shoulders. He thought of the four servants who went mad when he smiled at them in one of the bedrooms. Then, he thought of the Reverend Augustus Dampier, who needed a doctor



after he blew out his candle in the hall one night. Also, there was old Madame de Tremouillac, who was ill in bed for six weeks after she saw him sitting in her armchair reading her diary. He remembered all the people who had seen him at Canterville Chase, and how frightened he had made them. He felt very proud. He was the Canterville ghost! He was famous all over the country! No one wanted to see him, or to be in the house he haunted. And now, some foolish Americans were here. They gave him oil for his chains and threw pillows at his head!

"This is terrible!" thought the ghost. "People should not treat ghosts in this way! They should shake and scream. They should run and hide. They should leave Canterville Chase and never come back!"

The ghost decided that it was time to teach the Otis family a lesson. He wanted revenge, and he wanted to make them afraid.

For the rest of the night, the ghost thought and planned until he had the perfect idea for revenge.



• 5. A Plan Goes Wrong •

The next morning, when the Otis family met at breakfast, they talked about the ghost.

"I do not want to upset the ghost," said Mr Otis. "After all, this was his house a long time ago. I don't think it is polite to throw pillows at him." He looked at the twins and they started to laugh.

"However," said Mr Otis, "the ghost's chains make too much noise, and I cannot sleep. He doesn't want to oil them, so I think we must take the chains away from him."

For the rest of the week, however, they did not hear the ghost. They knew he was there, because the blood stain on the library floor changed every day. Sometimes it was dark red, and at other times it was purple. One morning it was bright green! The family thought that these changes were funny, and tried to guess what colour the stain was before they came downstairs each morning. The only person who did not enjoy the joke was Virginia. She was always very upset when she saw the stain, and nearly cried on the morning when it was bright green.

The ghost finally appeared again on Sunday night. Soon after the family went to bed, the ghost



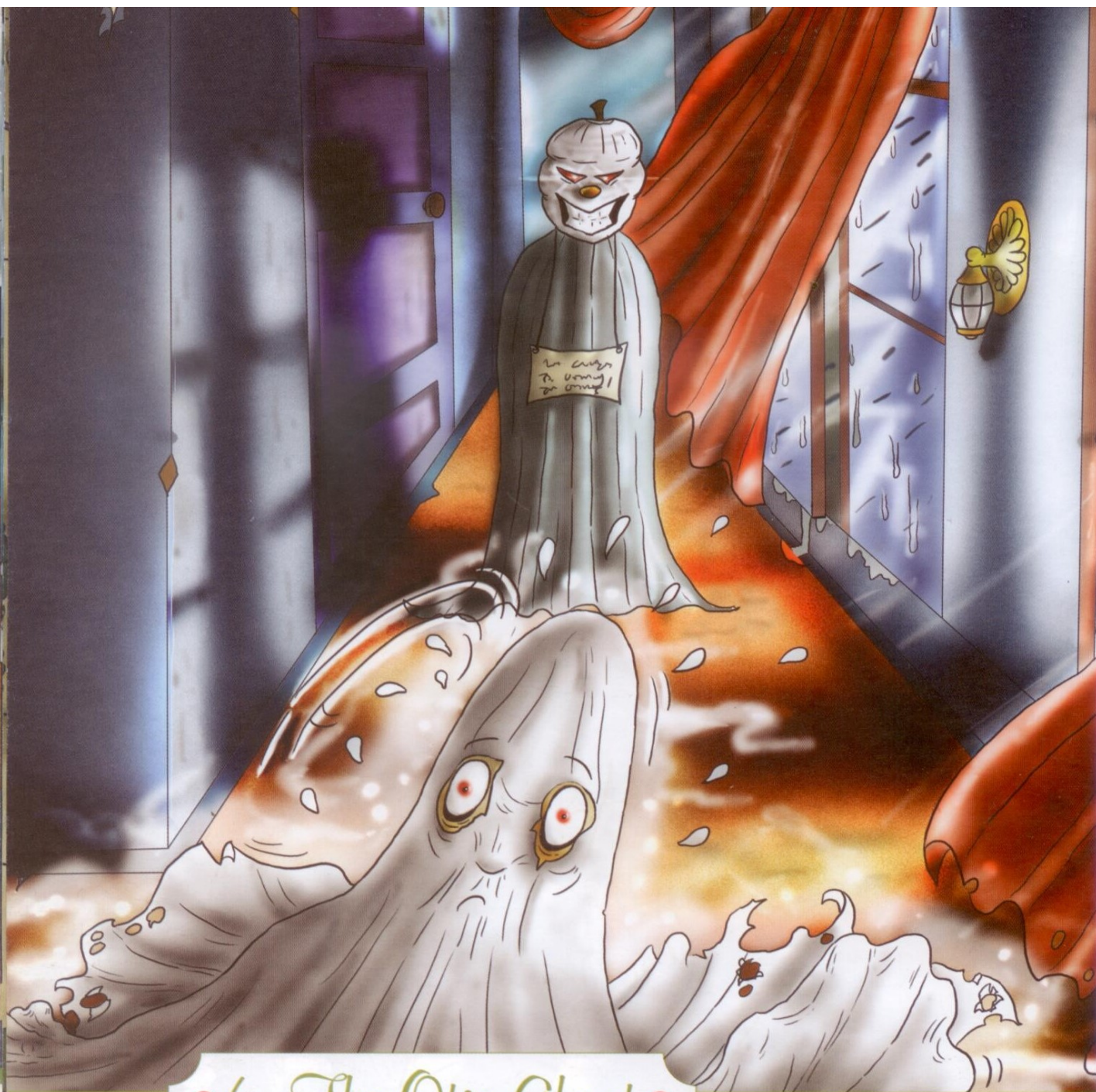
tried to put on a suit of armour which stood in the hall. However, the armour was very heavy and it fell to the floor. The family heard a terrible crash. Mr Otis and the twins ran downstairs. They saw the Canterville ghost sitting on a chair. The ghost rubbed his knees and looked very unhappy. The twins started to shoot pellets at the ghost, and Mr Otis tried to hold them back.

"What are you doing, sir?" he shouted at the ghost.

The ghost was angry. He made a terrible noise, then ran to the top of the stairs and laughed a terrible, ghostly laugh. Just then, Mrs Otis came out of her bedroom with a small bottle.

"You sound ill," she said. "Please take this bottle of Doctor Dobell's medicine. It's just what you need."

The ghost stared at her angrily. He tried to change into a dog, but at that moment, he heard footsteps and saw the twins coming towards him. He made a strange sound and disappeared.



• 6. The Otis Ghost •

The ghost was very upset. He stayed in his quiet room and did not come out at all, except to make a new blood stain in the library each night. However, after a few days he felt better, and decided to try to frighten the Otis family again.

That night, there was a terrible storm. The wind shook the doors and windows of the old house. The ghost was happy. He heard the family go to bed and he waited until the house was dark and quiet. Then, at midnight, he wrapped himself in a sheet. He went up the stairs and walked along the hall. He decided to scare Washington first, because he was angry with Washington for cleaning up the blood stain. The ghost waited at the corner of the hall outside Washington's bedroom. When he heard the clock strike a quarter past midnight, he smiled and turned the corner. Suddenly he screamed and covered his face with his hands. There was another ghost in the hall. Its head was bald and its face was round, fat, and white. It smiled a horrible smile, and a red light shone from its eyes. There was a sign on its chest, but the Canterville ghost was too frightened to read it. He



ran back to his room, falling over his own sheet as he raced down the hall. When he got to his room, he jumped into bed and covered his face with the covers. But after a while, he felt brave again. He decided to go and talk to the other ghost as soon as morning came.

"After all," he thought, "two ghosts are better than one. We can frighten the family together."

When the sun came up, the ghost went back to the hall outside Washington's bedroom. The ghost was there, but now it looked different. There was no red light in its eyes, and it did not look very frightening at all. The Canterville ghost touched the other ghost and its head fell off. He saw that it wasn't a ghost at all. It was just a kitchen brush, a sheet and a large turnip with a candle in it. He picked up the sign and read it. The sign said "THE OTIS GHOST. THE ONLY TRUE GHOST!"

The Canterville ghost was very angry.

"Those foolish Americans tricked me!" he thought. "How can I make them sorry for this?"



• 7. The Twins' Tricks •

The Otis family made the ghost upset and nervous. He stayed in his room and he jumped every time he heard a noise.

"I have to appear in the hall at night," he thought. "I have to make strange and terrible noises. I am a ghost and it's my duty. I must do it."

Sir Simon was an evil man when he was alive, but now he was dead, his ghost wanted to do his job properly. Every Saturday, he walked in the hall from midnight until three o'clock, but he tried not to let the family see or hear him. He took off his shoes, and he even took a bottle of Tammany Rising Sun Lubricator from Mr Otis' bedroom and oiled his chains. However, the family knew that he was there, and the twins played terrible tricks on him. One night, they tied a piece of string to the furniture on each side of the hall. The ghost tripped over the string in the dark and fell over. On another night, the twins put some butter at the top of the stairs. The ghost slipped on the butter and fell all the way down to the bottom of the stairs. This made the ghost very angry, so he decided to frighten the twins. The next night, he wore different clothes. He took off his head and left it in



his room. Then he went to the twins' bedroom. The door was not quite closed. The ghost pushed the door hard, and a large bucket of water fell from the top of the door and splashed all over him. The ghost was very wet, and very unhappy, but the twins laughed and laughed.

The ghost went back to his room and stayed in bed with a cold for the next two days.

"At least I didn't take my head with me," he thought, "so I'm not wet all over."

The ghost did not try to frighten the Otis family again. He still appeared in the hall once a week, and the twins still played tricks on him. Sometimes they put nutshells on the floor of the hall to hurt his feet. Once, they hid in the hall, jumped out at him and shouted "BOO!" But after a while, they did not see the ghost any more, so the family decided that the ghost was gone for ever.

The Otis family were wrong. The ghost was still in the house, but he was so frightened of the twins that he became quite ill. He spent most of his time in his room and often stayed in bed.



• 8. Virginia and the Ghost •

The young Duke of Cheshire had come to stay with the family for a while and he was in love with Virginia and wanted to marry her. One day, Virginia went horse riding with the Duke. She tore her dress on a fence and went home to change her clothes. As she ran to her bedroom, she went past the ghost's room. She saw the ghost by the window. He looked very sad and Virginia felt sorry for him.

"Don't worry, ghost," she said. "My brothers are going back to school tomorrow. After that, if you are good, no one will annoy you."

The ghost looked at Virginia in surprise.

"How can I be good?" he asked. "It is my job to walk in the hall, to make a noise with my chains and to frighten people."

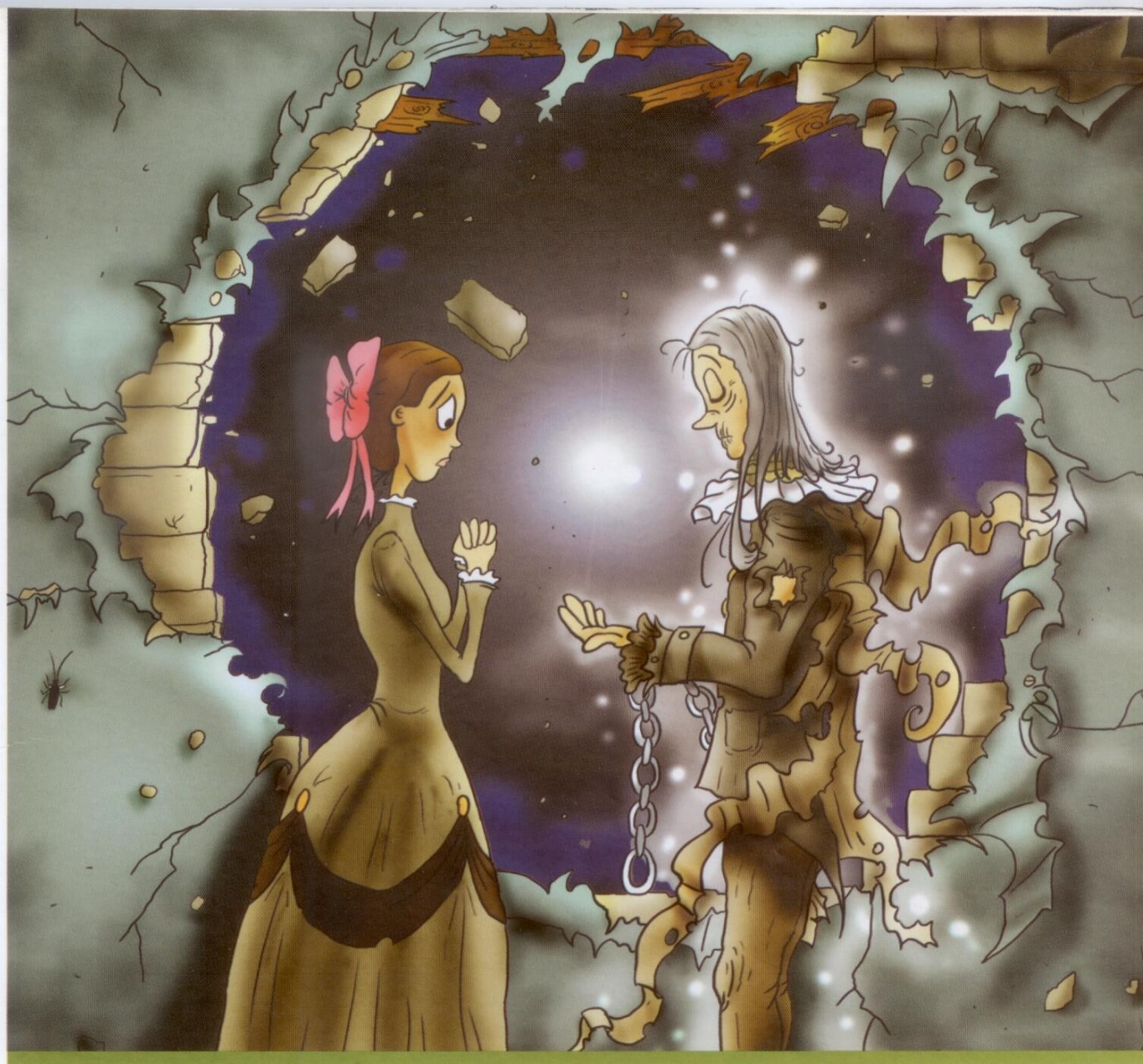
"Mrs Umney told us that you killed your wife," said Virginia. "Is that true?"

"Yes, it is true," said the ghost, "but it was a family problem, and it's no one else's business."

"It's wrong to kill people," said Virginia.

"You don't understand," said the ghost. "She was a terrible wife, and I don't think it was very nice of her brothers to starve me to death, even though I did kill her."

"They starved you to death?" cried Virginia. "Oh, poor ghost. Are you hungry? I've got a sandwich in my bag."



"No, thank you," said the ghost. "I never eat or sleep, but you are very kind. You are not like the rest of your rude, dishonest family."

"My family are not rude or dishonest!" cried Virginia. "You are dishonest! I know you took all the paints from my box to make the stain in the library! You took all the reds, then all the purple, and when they were all gone you used green!"

"Well, what could I do?" asked the ghost. "It is so difficult to get real blood these days."

Then the ghost started to cry.

"Please, don't be angry with me, I'm so unhappy" he said. "I want to sleep, but I cannot and I'm so tired."

"How can I help you?" asked Virginia.

"The only place where I can sleep is in the Garden of Death," said the ghost. "You can help me get there. You are sweet and good. You can ask the Angel of Death to let me sleep forever."

"I'm not afraid," said Virginia. "Let me help you."

The ghost took Virginia's hands. Suddenly, the wall opened up into a big black hole. The hole closed around Virginia and the ghost, and the room was empty.



• 9. Sir Simon's Secret •

When Virginia did not come down for tea ten minutes later, Mrs Otis sent one of the servants to look for her. But the servant could not find Virginia. At first, Mrs Otis was not worried, but when it got dark, she became afraid. The family looked all over the house and garden, but they did not find Virginia. Mr Otis, Washington and the young Duke took their horses and rode around for hours. They looked in the village and in the fields, and they asked at the station, but they did not find Virginia. They returned to the house and ate dinner. No one spoke during the meal. They all thought about Virginia.

Then, at midnight, just as the clock struck for the twelfth time, there was a crash of thunder. The family heard strange music and ran into the hall. Just then, the wall at the top of the stairs opened up and out stepped Virginia. Her face was white and there was a small box in her hands.

"Where were you?" asked Mr Otis.

"I was with the ghost," said Virginia. "He gave me this box of beautiful jewels."

"Oh, my dear! We were all so worried," cried Mrs Otis.

"You must come with me," said Virginia. "I have something to show you."

The family and the Duke followed Virginia through the wall, along a secret corridor and into a



small room.

There was a large metal ring on the wall, with chains hanging from it. On the other end of the chains was a skeleton.

"This is Sir Simon," said Virginia. "He was a bad man, but in the end he was very sorry. His wife's brothers kept him here until he died."

There was an old jug and plate on the floor. Virginia pointed to them.

"Look how his hand is reaching out for food and water," she said. "The jug and plate were too far away for him to reach."

Now the jug was empty, and there was only a pile of dust on the plate.

Virginia fell to her knees beside the skeleton, and the rest of the family looked at the terrible sight in front of them.

"Now we know the ghost's secret," said Mr Otis. "What a terrible story."

"His sadness is over," said Virginia. "Now he can sleep."

"You are an angel," said the Duke, and he took Virginia's hand and kissed it.



• 10. A Funeral and a Wedding •

Four days later, there was a funeral at Canterville Chase. The funeral started at eleven o'clock at night. Beautiful black horses pulled black funeral carriages. Inside one of the carriages was a black coffin with a purple cloth on top of it. The servants walked beside the carriages with lighted torches. It was an amazing sight.

Lord Canterville travelled from Wales for the funeral. He sat in the first carriage with Virginia. Mr and Mrs Otis were in the next carriage, and Washington and the twins were behind them in the third carriage. Mrs Umney was in the last carriage. She had spent fifty years in the house with the ghost, and he had frightened her many times. She wanted to be there to say goodbye to him.

They buried Sir Simon in the churchyard. Virginia put some flowers on his grave and her eyes filled with tears.

"Goodbye, Sir Simon," she said.

The next morning, before Lord Canterville left Canterville Chase, Mr Otis asked him to take the jewels.

"The jewels belong to your family," he said. "They are worth a lot of money, so you must take them. However, Virginia wants to keep the box. Can I give it to her?"



Lord Canterville smiled and shook his head.

"The jewels are Virginia's," he said. "Sir Simon wanted her to have them, and she must keep them. After all, we don't want the ghost to come back!"

So Virginia kept the jewels and wore them when she married the Duke of Cheshire a few years later. She became the Duchess of Cheshire, and she was very happy. The Duke and Duchess loved each other very much. After their honeymoon, they travelled to Canterville Chase to visit Virginia's parents. They stopped at the churchyard on the way, and Virginia put fresh flowers on Sir Simon's grave.

"What happened when you were with the ghost?" asked the Duke.

"I can't tell you, my dear Cecil," said Virginia. "Please don't ask me."

The Duke smiled.

"You can keep your secret," he said, "as long as I have your love."

"You always have my love, Cecil," said Virginia.

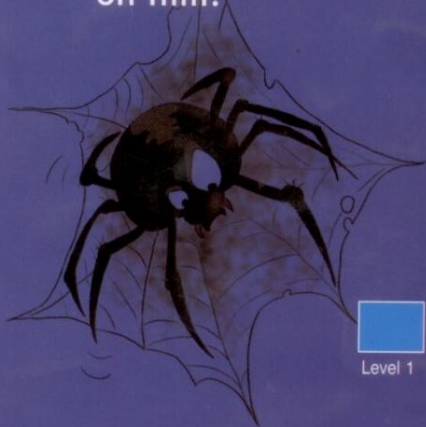
"Good," said Cecil. "Then perhaps one day, you can tell your secret to our children."

Virginia smiled and took the Duke's hand. They walked happily towards Canterville Chase.



The Canterville Ghost

The Canterville ghost has been haunting Canterville Chase for 300 years, scaring everyone who dares to live or work there. This all changes, though, when a family of bold and brash Americans comes to live in his ancestral home. Instead of being scared by the ghost, they start playing tricks on him!



Level 1 Level 2 Level 3 Level 4 Level 5 Level 6

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